DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 210 480 CE 030 746

TITLE Unmet Needs of Low Academic Level Adult (0-4th Grade Level) Students: A Follow-Up Study. A Special Demonstration/Teacher Training Project. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Portage Township Schools, Ind.
SPONS AGENCY Indiana State Dept. of Public Instruction, Indianapolis.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 47p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Basic Education; Adult Students; *Dropout Attitudes; *Dropout Prevention; Dropouts; Educational Benefits; Educational Needs; *Enrollment Influences; *Outcomes of Education; *Participant Satisfaction; Program Effectiveness; Student Attitudes; Student Educational Objectives; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance
IDENTIFIERS Indiana

ABSTRACT

An Indiana 310 Project was conducted to determine the needs of very low level adult basic education students (0-4th grade). Specifically, the study sought to answer the following four questions: (1) What brings low academic level students into ABE programs? (2) What aspects of the ABE programs do low academic level students dislike? (3) Why do low academic level students drop out of ABE programs? and (4) What major benefits do low academic level students derive participating in an ABE program? Data were collected from 184 1979-80 school year, low academic level dropouts of the Northwest Indiana Adult Learning Centers through personal or telephone interviews. From the data gathered, it appears that most students were primarily attracted to the ABE program through radio or newspaper advertising, flyers, or through another person who had heard of the programs through these means. Although most students could not think of aspects of the program they disliked, a few complaints about teachers, books, transportation, and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) were heard. Most of the students who had dropped out did so for reasons beyond the teachers' control. Other reasons included inadequate transportation, lack of child care, impatient teachers, inconvenient hours, CETA pay, and books too easy or too hard. Nearly all the students gained an awareness of what an Adult Learning Center offers and plan to attend again; benefits gained by a few included better jobs, registering to vote, better reading skills, and better money management skills. It was recommended that the ABE program continue its present programs and advertising, but work to maximize teacher behavior of giving clear and simple explanations as the best methods of retaining low academic level students. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED210480

FINAL REPORT of

UNMET NEEDS OF LOW ACADEMIC LEVEL ADULT (0-4th GRADE LEVEL) STUDENTS: A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

FY-81-8082-P

a special demonstration/teacher training project

funded by a grant from the

Indiana Department of Public Instruction

under Section 310 of the Adult Education Act, P.L. 91-230 as amended

Portage Adult Education, Grantee

Edwin Russell, Project Director

Rex Miller, Project Director

1981

CE 030 746

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ The document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Zeiler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a special demonstration project, funded by a grant from the Indiana Department of Public Instruction, Division of Adult and Community Education under Section 310 of the Adult Education Act, P. L. 91-230.

Adult Education Directors who cooperated with the program include the following:

Ken Woodruff, Portage Township Schools
Bob Razumich, Gary Community Schools
George Finney, Michigan City Area Schools

The questionaire used in this study was developed by a research committee. The committee also reviewed and assessed the significance of the data generated by this questionaire. Members of the committee were as follows:

Ed Russell, Project Director
Ken Woodruff, A. E. Director
Bob Razumich, A. E. Director
George Finney, A. E. Director
Sonnie Cox, Resource Center Director
Jackie Newton, A. B. E. Teacher
Carol Smock, A. B. E. Teacher
Margo Sonida, A. B. E. Teacher
Lois Stone, A. B. E. Teacher
Lou Tomasko, A. B. E. Teacher

Jane Grazier, of Demonstrator-Research Service, acted as a trainer for our interviewers.

George Wood, of Ball State University, acted as a research consultant on the project.

The six interviewers, all A.B.E. students or alumni, were Vern Hensley, Loretta Bakewell, Donna Smurdon, Lavella Casey, Lonnie Johnson, and Lydia Yanez.

Linda Oswald was the tireless secretary for this project.

Rex Miller was the author of the proposal for this project. Without his initiative this project would never have come into being. He was also the major contributor to the final editing of this report.

Ed Vochell, of Purdue University, analyzed the data in conjunction with a staff development workshop arranged by the Portage Resource Center.

The activity which is the subject of this report was supported by the U. S. Office of Adult Education, Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department of Education should be inferred.

ABSTRACT

This 310 Project addressed several questions. To answer these questions 184 low academic students of the 1979-80 school year from selected Northwest Indiana Adult Learning Centers were interviewed.

What brings low academic level students into A.B.E. programs - From the data it would appear that these students were primarily attracted to the Adult Learning Centers by direct and indirect effects of media. That is, either they heard about it on the radio, read about it in a flyer, saw an ad in the newspaper (all direct effects) or another person who had heard, read or saw one of the above and conveyed the message to them (indirect effect).

Aspects of A.B.E. programs which low academic level students disliked - Most of those questioned could not think of anything they disliked. The remaining responses could be grouped into six categories: complaints about oneself, complaints about the teacher, complaints about transportation, complaints about C.E.T.A., complaints about other students, and complaints about the books. The vast majority were pleased with the program and planned to return.

Reasons low academic level students drop out of A.B.E. programs - Most indicated they dropped out for reasons beyond the teachers control. Other responses varied. The main ones were as follows: inadequate transportation, availability of child care, impatient teachers, inconvenient hours, jealousy about C.E.T.A. pay, and books too easy or too hard.

Major benefits derived by low academic level students from participating in an A.B.E. program - Some indicated the experience helped them get a better job. Many felt they could manage their money better since attending an Adult Learning Center. Most claimed they read more since attending an Adult Learning Center. A few registered to vote, got a library card, or got their drivers license. Nearly all gained a new awareness of what an Adult Learning Center is and they plan to attend again in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	Introduction	1
II.	Information of Interest to the Researcher	7
	A. Objectives	7
	B. Procedure	7
	C. Outcomes	11
III.	Results of Interest to the Teacher	12
	A. Why Do Low Level Students Drop Out?	12
	B. How Do Low Level Students Learn of Their Local A.B.E. Program?	15
	C. Why Do Low Level Students Decide to Attend?	17
	D. Are A.B.E. Students From Rural, Suburban, and Urban Areas Different in the Educational Approach They Need?	19
	E. What Do Low Level A.B.E. Drop Outs Dislike About The Adult Learning Centers They Attended?	21
	F. What Did The A.B.E. Students Like About Their Experience at Their Adult Learning Center?	23
	G. What is the Effect of Students Having Their Preferred Method Available?	25
	H. What Factor Within the Teacher's Control Most Closely Correlates With Low Level Student's Incidence of Returning to a Center After Once Dropping Out?	27
	I. What Benefits of the A.B.E. Program to Low Level Students Who Dropped Out?	29
IV.	Summary and Conclusions	31
V.	References	35
VI.	Appendix: Questionaire	38

I. INTRODUCTION

The Need

Most educators agree it is central to effective education that teachers understand student needs. To this end, the Indiana Department of Public Instruction, Division of Adult and Community Education has established the goal (1980-82 Adult Basic Education (A.B.E.) goals) of increasing service to low academic level students (0-4th grade level, not English as a Second Language (E.S.L.). The purpose of this study was to identify unmet needs of low academic level adult students, so that A.B.E. teachers would be better able to recruit and serve this population. This study of Northwest Indiana A.B.E. students sought answers to the following questions:

1. What brings low academic level students into A.B.E. programs?
2. What aspects of A.B.E. programs do low academic level students like?
3. What aspects of A.B.E. programs do low academic level students dislike?
4. Why do low academic level students drop out of A.B.E. programs?
5. What are the major benefits derived by low academic level students, from participating in an A.B.E. program?

The exact number of adults in this target population with low level academic skills was unknown, but the information available indicated this population was large. The 1970 United States Census showed Indiana had 88,140 adult residents with less than four years of formal schooling. Many who had attended beyond the fourth grade had academic skills below the fourth grade level.

Adult educators need to know more about this population in order to serve these individuals better. Low academic level adults are usually the individuals who could benefit most from education. Frequently, their lack of academic skills has handicapped them economically, socially, and politically. This population is overly represented on welfare rolls, in jails, and in other costly social programs.

A review of the literature indicated this student population is difficult to study. Their low academic skills have made it almost impossible for researchers to obtain responses to mailed questionaires.

Frequently, members of this population live in high crime areas where researchers do not like to go, and members of this population often do not have telephones. Also, many in this population are transient, and make an effort to avoid contact from strangers.

There have been a few earlier follow-up studies that looked at former students from all A.B.E. academic levels. In 1970, a study was conducted that examined eighty-five former A.B.E. students from programs in West Virginia. This study attempted to assess the impact on "the economic, family, educational, and community lives of ex-students...."[1] This study found that A.B.E. students could have benefited from the integration of vocational education, job placement assistance, and training in community resources, into their program of study. The West Virginia study was also

---

[1]Appalachian Adult Basic Education Demonstration Center, Demonstration Developmental and Research Project for Programs, Materials, Facilities, and Educational Technology for Undereducated Adults, (Morehead, Kentucky, 1970). p.1.

attempting to assess the need for A.B.E. programs to offer follow-up support services to former students. The researcher concluded, "the most significant results are often those which are nearly impossible to measure, that is the encouragement or inspiration which our continuing interest might hopefully instill in one or more of our subjects or their families."[2]

Another follow-up study was conducted in Texas. This study was completed in 1974 and the study analyzed factors determining student enrollment in, attendance in, and completion of A.B.E. programs. Data was obtained by interviewing adults who had separated from an A.B.E. program during the preceding year. It was found that, "a relatively small percentage of adults surveyed....reported participating for reasons related to occupational or economic improvement."[3] The study also found that student's perceived satisfaction with his or her progress and achievement were major inducements to attend regularly.[4] The researchers concluded that, "it does not seem appropriate to evaluate the effectiveness of A.B.E. solely in terms of occupational or economic criteria. Neither does it seem appropriate to say that adults who have dropped out of programs before receiving some certificate, etc., have 'failed'. Success or failure must be relative to the goals which adults themselves have set."[5]

---

[2]Ibid., p. 84.

[3]Chad Richardson and Loren M. Nyer, Participation in Texas Progress of Adult Basic Education; An Identification and Analysis of Factors Related to Rates of Enrollment, Attendance, and Completion in Adult Basic Education (Austin, Texas, 1974), p. 78.

[4]Ibid., p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 78.

Another follow-up study was conducted in 1976 at the Gateway Technical Institute in Wisconsin. This study examined 273 former A.B.E. students that were enrolled between the years of 1973 and 1975. This study, like the two previous follow-up studies, examined students who came into an A.B.E. program with various degrees of academic skills. Over 54.3% of the former students who were interviewed in the study, came into the A.B.E. program with academic skills at fifth grade level or higher. Results of the survey showed that 65.5% of the former students did not change their employment status from the time of entry into A.B.E., to the time of follow-up.[6] Many respondents in this study, 56.3%, indicated they enrolled in A.B.E. because they wanted to prepare for another educational program, and 32.9% of the respondents actually enrolled in other educational programs after being terminated from A.B.E.[7] Probably one of the most significant findings of the Gateway study, was that 77.6% of the former students who were given the reading portion of the WRAT (an academic achievement test) during the interview had increased reading grade levels.[8]

Although there are no previous follow-up studies that have looked specifically for the unmet needs of low academic level students, there have been studies designed for other purposes, but which also assessed

---

[6]Ruth Fallon, Adult Basic Education Follow-up Study (Paper presented at the Adult Education Research Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 20-22, 1977); E.R.I.C. Document Reproduction Service, P. O. Box 190, Arlington, VA, ED 139-997, p. 17.

[7]Ibid., p. 18.

[8]Ibid., p. 18.

the needs of low level students as an element of their overall procedure. The two most pertinent of these studies were "A Model for Increased Recruitment and Improved Retention of Adults With Minimal Skills" by Sue A. Miller, and "A Descriptive Analysis of the Application the CLER Model of Innovation Adoption and Diffusion to the Recruitment of Hobart Township Indiana Adults With Less Than A Sixth Grade Education into the New Chicago Adult Learning Center" by Ed Russell.

In Sue Miller's 1979-80 study, low level students gave the following reasons for separation from the A.B.E. program (percentages were interpolated from total data in the study): Met personal objectives (14%), no progress or too difficult (12%), lack of teacher attention (12%), health problems (11%), transportation problems (9%), personal work load too heavy (9%), family problems (8%), inconvenient time (6%), child care (6%), to take new job (4%), moved (2%), uncomfortable with other students (1%). The study also notes that those students "who felt the 'optimum learning conditions' were present had the lowest separation rate."

In Russell's 1978-79 study, low level students of Hobart, Portage, and Westchester Townships in Northwest Indiana, gave the following suggestions as ways to encourage people to participate in Adult Learning Center programs: Improve learning conditions (58%)--such as, "provide more teachers," "have less noise"; do more advertising (25%); remove barriers to participation (16%)--such as, lack of child care or transportation; or child care problems (8.8%).

In summation, several studies have been done in the general area of low level students. However, none have succinctly identified, or attempted to identify, the low academic level adult student's unmet needs. Some of the fore mentioned studies have dealt with various aspects of this topic but none have researched it as an objective in and of itself.

II. INFORMATION OF INTEREST TO THE RESEARCHER

A. Objectives

This study was initiated to address certain questions about the low level Adult Basic Education drop outs of Northwest Indiana; specifically:

1. What brings them to the program?
2. What program aspects do they like?
3. What program aspects do they dislike?
4. Why do they drop out?
5. What benefits did they derive from their stay?

B. Procedure

To answer these questions selected former Adult Basic Education students were interviewed. Their selection was based upon the criteria that (1) they had dropped out of Northwest Indiana A.B.E. programs during the 1979-80 school year, (2) they entered this A.B.E. program at a fourth grade or below educational level, and (3) they were available to be interviewed. These students were selected from the nine A.B.E. programs which volunteered to participate in this study.

The nine centers were of three categories - urban, suburban, and rural. This imparted a somewhat representative nature to the data. However, urban students out-numbered the suburban students (7 to 1) and rural students (7 to 2). In all, the centers provided the names of 329 potential contacts which comprised all those students which met the project's aforementioned criteria.

There was a wide difference in educational methods practiced at the nine centers. One site had a more traditional program utilizing mass classroom instruction by subject, frequently relying on a teacher presentation/lecture followed by tutorial assistance given to individual students.

Another site used the learning laboratory approach where a majority of student time was typically spent learning with a teaching machine.

Three sites provided an open entry program wherein students were tested upon entry, placed in programmed texts at the level of their subject content needs and assisted individually on a tutorial basis as the student requests such assistance. Informal counseling and referral to social services were an integral part of meeting student needs in these three centers. Students were allowed to come and go as their own personal need dictated.

Four centers operated a similar open entry program except students were served by a non-licensed teacher aide. The licensed traveling teacher would spend time at (and bring materials to) these sites once or twice a week. At other times the teacher aide provided the instruction, also in the open entry format.

To interview the students from these nine program sites, six interviewers were hired and trained. All were A.B.E. alumni. Two were black; three were white; and one was Hispanic. Ages ranged from 28 to 58. Two were male and four were female.

Prior to training the interviewers, a 27 question questionaire was developed to guide the interviews. The questionaire was developed by a research committee of eight individuals who were knowledgeable in the field of Adult Education. This committee had to modify an initial 40 question questionaire to more accurately generate the desired information for the project.

A pretest of this new questionaire was conducted on 10 1979-80 low level students. These students were randomly selected from the 329 names available. The data from the interviews and a journal of the data collection process was sent to a research expert for his analysis and comment.

The Research Committee examined the results of the pilot interviews, the journal of the data collection process, the research expert's analysis and comment, and a computer expert's recommendations for adapting the questionaire for a computer treatment of the data. On the basis of this information, the committee produced the 27 question questionaire (see the Appendix for sample copy) which was used by the six interviewers.

The questions were of three types, (1) general information items: name, address, et cetera, (2) multiple choice items, and (3) open-ended items. Interviewers asked the open-ended items, paused, then followed with the "prompters" if the respondent could not think of a response.

The interviewers were given a total of twenty-four hours of training under a field experienced interviewing expert. They were instructed in the general technique of interviewing and the use of this project's questionaire. Then they received expert-observed field experience with follow-up analysis.

The interviewers were sent out to locate and interview the 329 former low academic level students from the participating centers. The interviewers were divided into teams of two and given a list of 10 persons each week for the purpose of sending a form letter of introduction. The letter was followed by a phone call or personal visit to the address on

the list. The phone call was, ideally, followed by a face-to-face interview. When a face-to-face interview was not possible, a telephone interview was accepted. Where address and/or phone number were incorrect, the interviewer checked with friends, neighbors, and the Post Office to determine where the former student had moved.

Only after three unsuccessful attempts to contact a person would the interviewer mark that person's questionaire with the words "couldn't contact."

A weekly staff meeting addressed the problems of the interviewing process. The primary problem was the large number of "couldn't contact" names on the master list. The Project Director closely supervised the data collecting process, and made numerous follow-up calls of those interviewed to check the accuracy of the information being collected.

When all the possible interviews were completed, the project secretary tallied the results on a composite master sheet. A computer print-out of several key questions and their cross tabulations was produced.

The Research Committee reconvened to review the data. They analyzed the data, selected important facts, identified contrasts and made recommendations.

On the basis of the data and the Research Committee's report, the Project Director authored the first draft of this report. The Research Committee and other important professionals reviewed the first draft of the report and made editorial comments.

C. Outcomes

The final draft of the report was authored by the Project Director. A format was selected to make the data of most use to the A.B.E. teacher and other such professionals in the field. The aim was to provide (from the data and related literature) clear, concise information on issues of daily importance in the practice of Adult Basic Education.

There were 250 copies printed and distributed among the Indiana A.B.E. Program Directors and interested A.B.E. teachers for their use and comment.

III. RESULTS OF INTEREST TO A.B.E. TEACHERS

WHY DO LOW LEVEL STUDENTS DROP OUT?

> "Most low level students who drop out of Adult Learning Centers probably do so because of conditions which are outside the classroom and largely beyond the teacher's control."

When the former A.B.E. students were asked why they dropped out, 91 percent gave a reason which was extraneous to the activities of the Center, such as, job conflict, personal problems, etc. Conversely, only nine percent said, "The books" -- each explaining that either they were too difficult or too simple.

There could have been other logical causes for students dropping out. For example, premature withdrawal from an A.B.E. program could be associated with opposition to attendance by a person of significance to the student. Yet, 93 percent of those interviewed indicated that no one was opposed to their attending the A.B.E. program.

The drop outs could have perceived their teachers as inferior and, therefore, opted not to waste time attending. Much to the contrary, the survey showed 99 percent of those interviewed rated their teacher fair to excellent. Furthermore, approximately 80 percent felt they had received adequate teacher time and in no way were they hindered in their learning by the teacher.

Most of those interviewed (91 percent) went on to state that their teacher understood them and their learning problems, and that they perceived the teacher as being geruinely helpful.

Another explanation for dropping out could be that the atmosphere at the learning sites was unfriendly. Such could have been the factor which discouraged these students enough to drop out. However, the interviewee's response has 98 percent stating that their Adult Learning Center was a friendly place!

If the methods of learning available in the Center were not that preferred by the students, they might logically drop out. Yet, 85 percent of the interviewed drop outs confirmed that their preferred method of study was available in their A.B.E. program. (However, 41 percent said it was only available few times, or never.)

Perhaps the low level students are the one's most likely to attend as part of C.E.T.A. training, and when they stopped being paid, they dropped out. Our survey shows, though, that only 2.7 percent stated that C.E.T.A. pay was a factor in their discouragement.

Nearly 50 percent of those to be interviewed in this study had moved and left no forwarding address, nor clues to their whereabouts.

When those who were actually interviewed were asked "What is one change, that if it had been made, would have made you stay in the A.B.E. program?" only nine percent named factors within the classroom teacher's control (i.e.--teacher behaviors, class hours, quiet atmosphere, appropriate books).

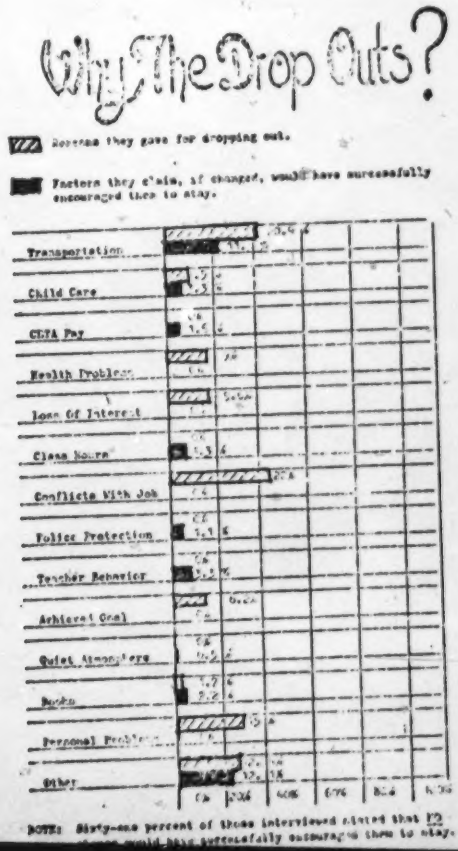
The response to this question is quite consistent with all the other responses preceding it. It appears that most low level students who dropped out of Northwest Indiana Adult Learning Centers did so because

of conditions which were both outside the classroom and largely beyond the teacher's control.

In Sue Miller's study, 73 percent of the reasons given for separating from the A.B.E. program were also outside the classroom and beyond the teacher's control.

In the Russell study, only 30 percent of the students indicated factors outside the classroom. However, the questions in that study did not ask the low level student why he/she dropped out but why they thought <u>others</u> dropped out. Thus their response could have been based on an erronous guess unrelated to the interviewees actual experience.

On the basis of the present study and the Sue Miller study, it appears more likely that a significant number of low level students prematurely exit A.B.E. programs for reasons over which the teacher has no control.



HOW DO LOW LEVEL STUDENTS LEARN OF THEIR LOCAL A.B.E. PROGRAMS?

> "It appears that low academic level students in Northwest Indiana learn about Adult Basic Education programs through advertising."

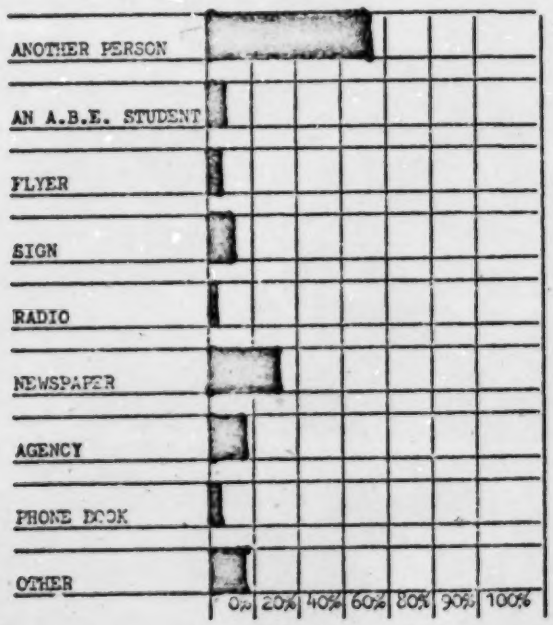
When asked how they heard of the Center, 27.5 percent of the respondents named some form of advertising; while 52 percent said they heard of it from a friend. Only four percent heard of it from a former student.

While it is difficult to tell where the "friend" learned of the program, it is possible to make a judgment about it based upon available facts. Since only four percent of the students learned of the Center via alumni, and 27.5 percent learned by advertising, it seems logical that the "friends" probably learned of the Center primarily through advertising, as well. The friends may serve as an indirect conduit by which the advertising message reaches its target. Low level students appear to become aware of the Adult Learning Center chiefly because of these direct and indirect effects of advertising. This is in contrast to the view of some educators that students learn about the Center via its reputation, spread by word of mouth eminating from present and former students.

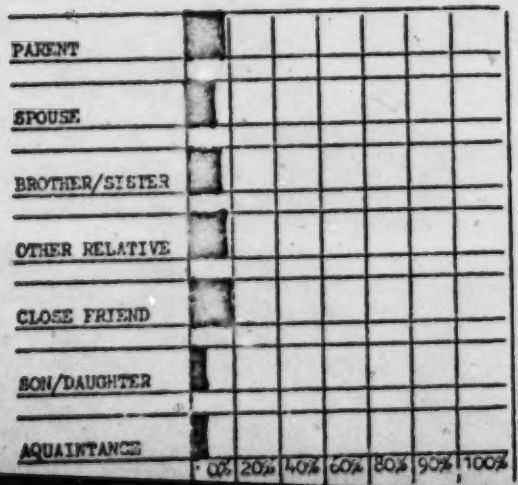
One study (Russell's) examined how students learned of Adult Learning Centers. The results were similar, with 22 percent saying they decided to enroll after exposure to an indirect source of advertisement (i.e.--friends, relatives, and former students). However, in Russell's study, 47 percent learned of the school through an agency referral! (In the present study, only nine percent learned of the Center through agency referral.)

It appears wide use of advertising is a most effective means of allowing low level students to learn of the Adult Learning Center. Agency referral deserves further investigation to determine its potential effectiveness in "spreading the word" about an A.B.E. program to the low level student.

HOW DID YOU LEARN OF THE CENTER?



WHO ENCOURAGED YOU TO ATTEND?



WHY DO LOW LEVEL STUDENTS DECIDE TO ATTEND?

> "In Northwest Indiana low academic level students most frequently made the decision to attend Adult Learning Centers because of a desire to pass the G.E.D. test."

When asked "Why did you decide to attend an Adult Learning Center?", 76 percent of those interviewed said, "To pass the G.E.D." Nearly 13 percent came to improve their reading or math skills. Only 1.6 percent stated they wanted to get into another educational program.

The reasons why low level students decide to attend an Adult Learning Center may vary greatly with a study's geographic location, time frame, and circumstance since there is little agreement on this question among the various studies.

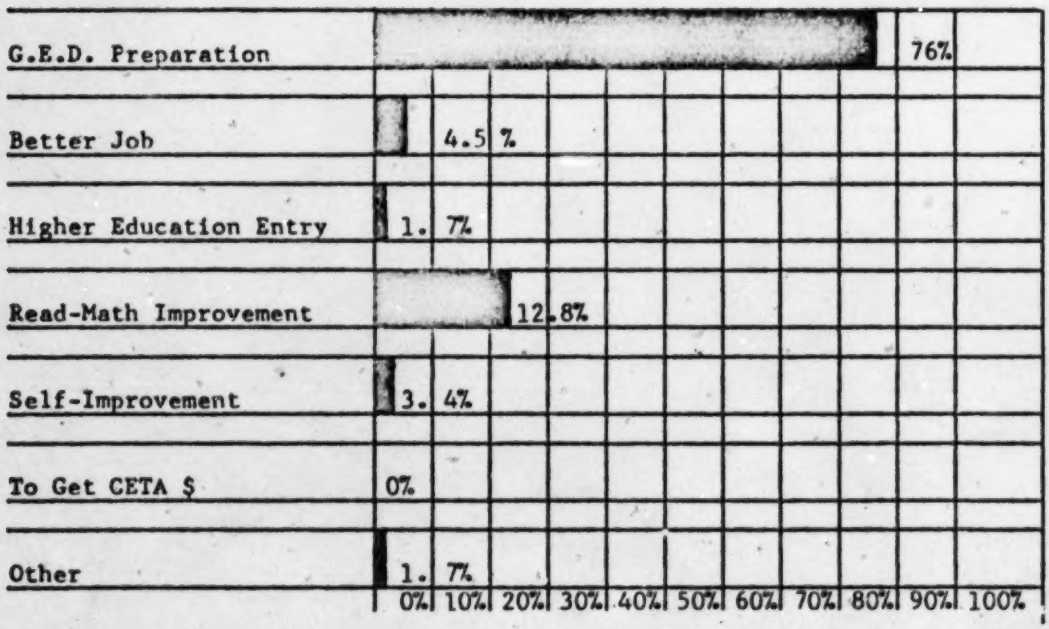
In Russell's study, only 22 percent of the A.B.E. students interviewed thought people attended learning centers to prepare for the G.E.D. test. Nearly 41 percent thought people attended because they were hoping for some type of career fulfillment.

The Richardson-Nyer study clearly indicated that occupational or economic criteria were insignificant factors in student's decision to attend. Their test group seemed to be interested in educational improvement for its own sake.

The Fallon study indicated that 56.3 percent of its respondents enrolled in A.B.E. because they wanted to prepare for another educational program.

This study's target population was the Northwest Indiana low level A.B.E. drop outs of 1979-80. These Northwest Indiana low level students made the decision to attend Adult Learning Centers primarily because of a desire to pass the G.E.D. test.

WHY I DECIDED TO ATTEND?



ARE A.B.E. STUDENTS FROM RURAL, SUBURBAN AND URBAN AREAS DIFFERENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH THEY NEED?

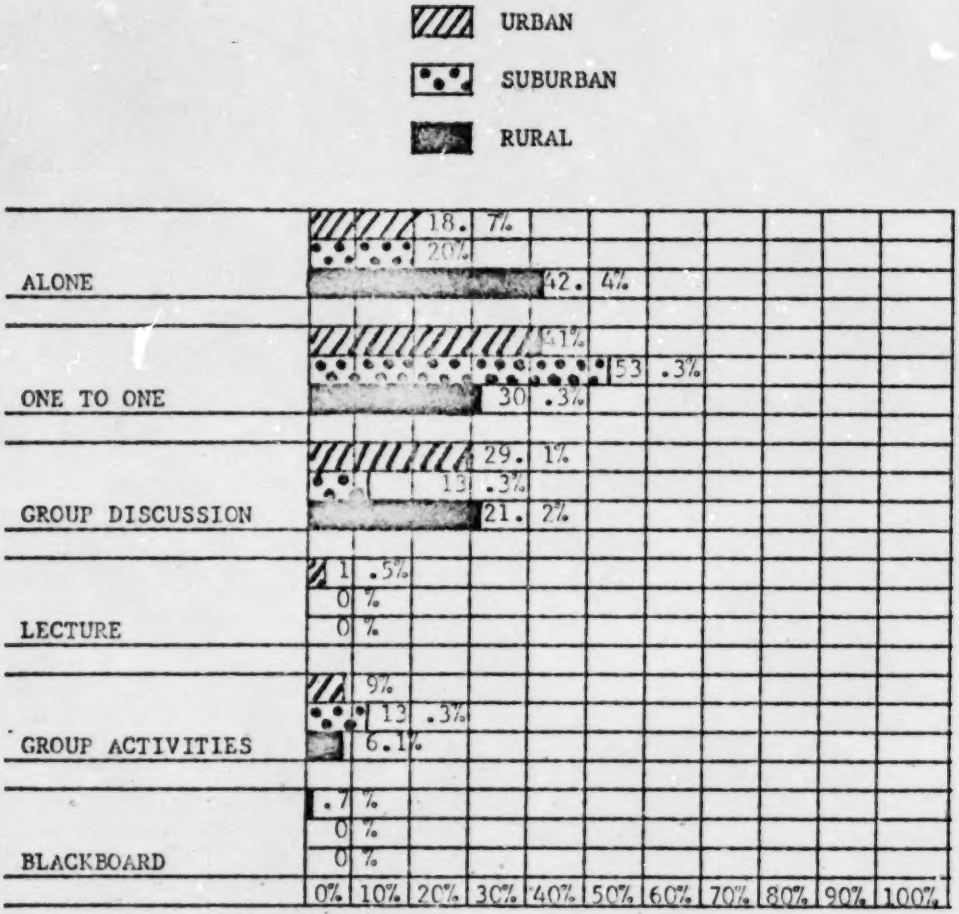
> "The only apparent difference among the urban, suburban and rural students is their preference in method of learning."

Urban interviewees tend to prefer a tutorial approach (41 percent) with second and third choices being group discussions (29.1 percent) and studying alone (18.7 percent).

Suburban interviewees preferred the tutorial, or one to one approach, even more than the urban students (53.3 percent). Rural students, on the other hand, preferred to study alone (42.2 percent) with second and third choices being the tutorial approach (30.3 percent) and group discussion (21.2 percent).

Few, if any studies other than this one have examined these differences in learning preference. Logically, further investigation of this phenomenon would be helpful to practitioners in developing their teaching strategies.

COMPARISON OF URBAN, SUBURBAN AND RURAL



WHAT DO LOW LEVEL A.B.E. DROP OUTS DISLIKE ABOUT THE ADULT LEARNING CENTERS THEY ATTENDED?

> "Low level drop outs tend to find it difficult to identify anything which displeases them about the Adult Learning Centers."

One of the questions asked the group of 1979-80 A.B.E. drop outs was, "What was the most discouraging thing about the whole experience?"

Forty-five percent could think of no discouraging aspect of the program! Thirty-seven percent named factors outside of the Adult Learning Centers--such as, transportation. The remaining responses include the teacher (7.7 percent), the books (5.5 percent), and other students (3.8 percent).

When all students asked to specifically identify what were their dislikes about the books and materials, 4.8 percent said they were too difficult and 2.2 percent said they were insultingly easy. The remaining 93 percent could find nothing they disliked about these materials.

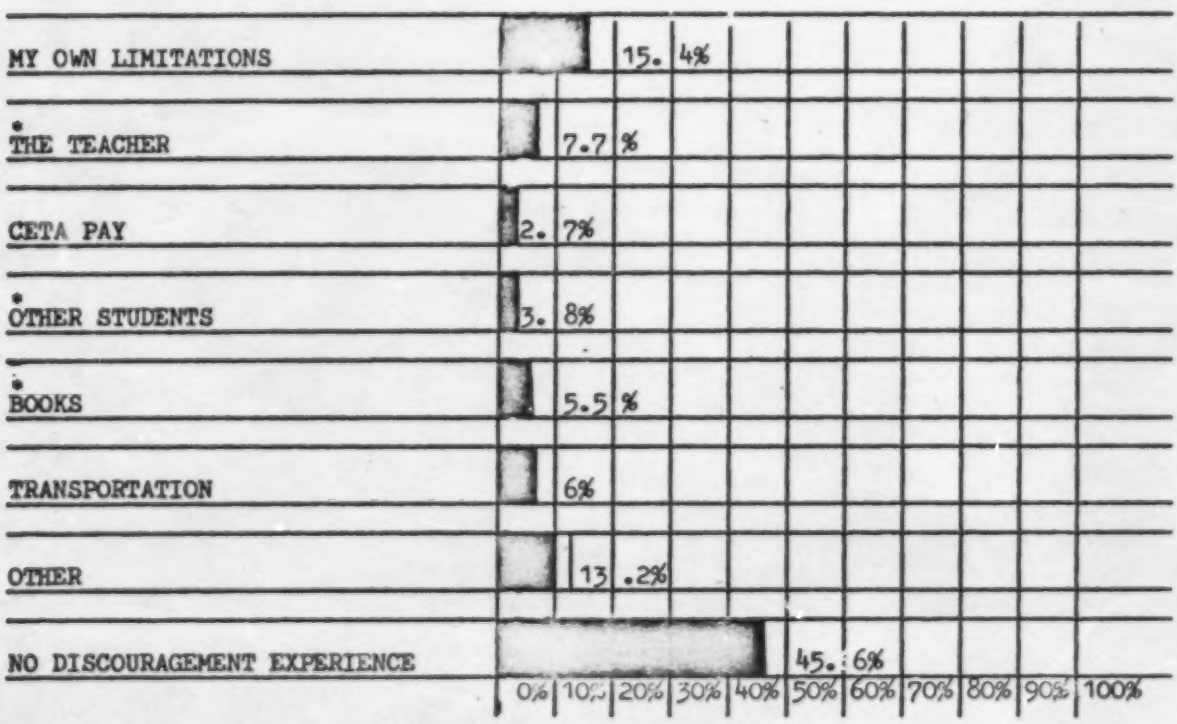
When quizzed about the teacher only one-half of one percent would rate the teacher as genuinely poor in performance. However, 7.7 percent stated that if the particular teaching method at their center had been changed, they would have remained in the program.

In the Sue Miller study, 12 percent complained about lack of teacher attention and 12 percent mentioned lack of progress as their reason for separation. The remaining 76 percent gave reasons that were irrelevant to the Adult Learning Center activities. Thus, Miller findings would seem to confirm the results of this study.

Russell's study asked drop outs why they thought others don't attend. Twenty-one percent were of the opinion that it was because others were unaware of the A.B.E. program. The remaining responses were outside the scope of an A.B.E. program--typically including transportation, child care, and job problems.

Since both Russell's and Miller's results tend to substantiate the results of this study, it seems reasonable to conclude that A.B.E. drop outs tend to find it difficult to identify anything which displeases them about Adult Learning Centers.

WHAT WAS THE MOST DISCOURAGING THING ABOUT THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE ?



• Student dislikes that represent a variable of an A.B.E. Program.

WHAT DID THE A.B.E. STUDENTS LIKE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE AT THEIR ADULT LEARNING CENTER?

> "Low academic level students appear overwhelmingly satisfied with their experiences while attending their Adult Learning Center."

Of all students interviewed, only 9.3 percent could not name some likeable aspect of their A.B.E. experience. The others appreciated the skills they had gained (34.1 percent), the teacher (15.4 percent), and the sense of self-improvement they gained (11 percent).

Additionally, 95 percent liked the books and materials, considering their most desirable attributes to be their simplicity (49.5 percent), clarity (21.4 percent), and helpfulness (11 percent).

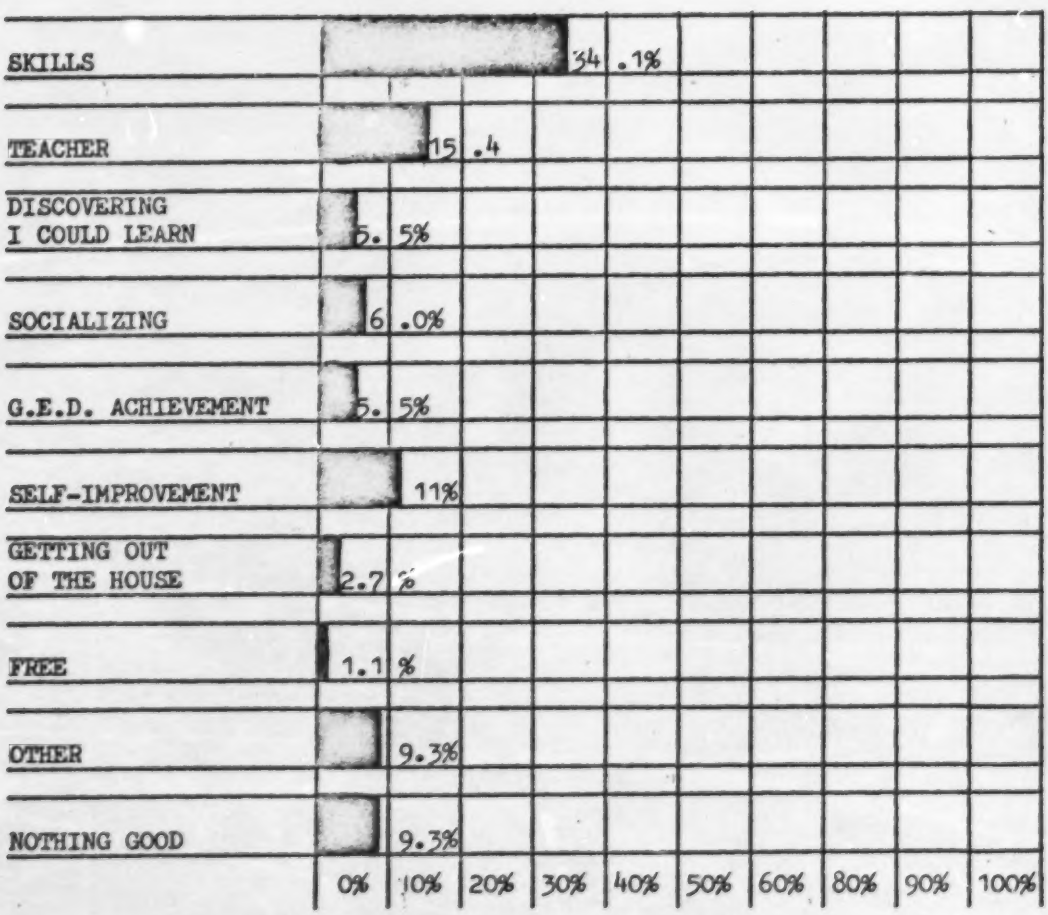
The interviewees almost unanimously stated that they liked the other students at the Center (94.3 percent).

Every student was able to identify a particular learning method they liked best, and 85 percent stated that their preferred method was available at their Adult Learning Center. Fifty-nine percent confirmed that their Adult Learning Center made their preferred method of study available often.

The Richardson/Nyer study found that a student's perceived satisfaction with his or her progress and achievement were major inducements to attend regularly. However, though the interviewees in this study were drop outs they generally perceived their progress and achievements with satisfaction.

This apparent contradiction may be reflection of the low level students living environment. That is, it is possible that he/she may be well satisfied with the Learning Center and highly motivated to attend regularly but problems outside the scope of the Learning Center--such as, health problems, transportation problems, etcetera--prevent them from attending as often as they would like.

THE BEST THING ABOUT MY A.B.E. EXPERIENCE



WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF STUDENTS HAVING THEIR PREFERRED METHOD OF INSTRUCTION AVAILABLE?

> "The availability of preferred methods of instruction at Northwest Indiana Adult Learning Centers appear to have little or no relationship to the low level drop out's rating of the teacher, expressions of discouragement, or plans to attend the Center in the future."

Student responses where the student often had his/her preferred method of instruction available, were examined and compared to their responses to other questions.

One surprising result was that students generally rated their teacher as fair to excellent whether or not the student's preferred method of instruction was used by the teacher. Of those who did not have their preferred method available, less than one percent rated their teacher negatively.

Among students who were able to identify areas of discouragement about the program, only 7.7 percent were among those who did not have their preferred method of instruction available. Apparently even when one's preferred method of instruction is unavailable, it is not a significant element of discouragement to the low level adult learner.

Of those who had their preferred method of instruction often available, 93 percent said they planned to attend in the future. Nearly the same percentage (91 percent) was true for those who did <u>not</u> have their preferred method of instruction often available.

No other study has reportedly observed this specific phenomenon but others[9] have noted the low level student's tendency toward passive behavior. Perhaps the above results are a reflection of this passivity. Perhaps there is an attitude that "The teachers are the experts." Therefore, whatever learning method the teacher makes available must be the most appropriate for one's situation--whether it is the one preferred or not. Such passive acceptance could help explain the apparent paradox of the above data. Certainly these questions deserve more in-depth research.

---

[9]W. H. Puder and S. E. Hand, "Personality Factors Which May Interfere With The Learning of A.B.E. Students," Adult Education (Winter 1968), p. 81-93.

WHAT FACTOR WITHIN THE TEACHER'S CONTROL MOST CLOSELY CORRELATES WITH LOW LEVEL STUDENT'S INCIDENCE OF RETURNING TO A CENTER AFTER ONCE DROPPING OUT?

> "There is a very high and strong correlation between low level drop outs who have returned to study at their Adult Learning Center and those students who described their teacher's most helpful behavior as, 'gave clear and simple explanations.'"

Of the thirty persons who stated at the time of the interview that they had returned to their Adult Learning Center and were, indeed, currently studying at it, 70 percent also said that the most helpful quality of their teacher was the way they "gave clear and simple explanations." Only 30 percent of all the other students (i.e.-students who had not yet returned to their Center) perceived this teacher quality as the most helpful.

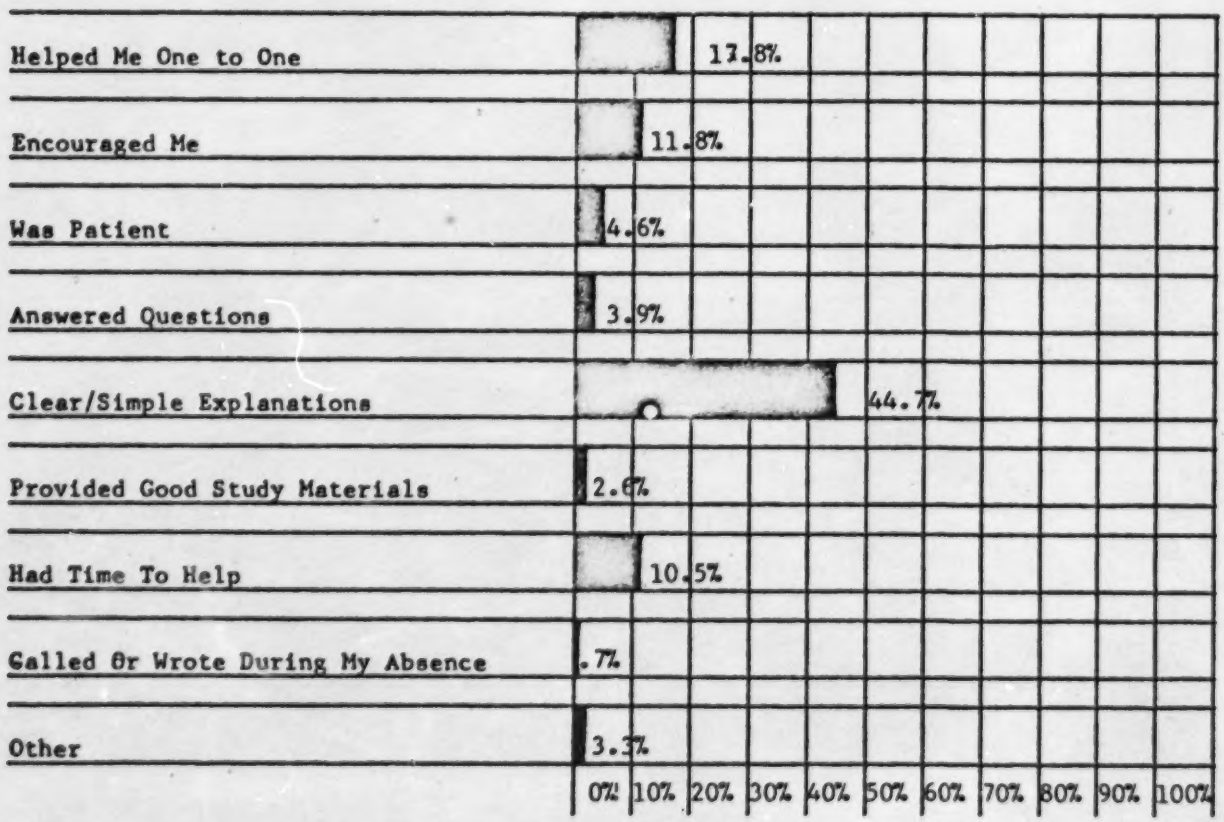
Furthermore, no other single program variable (i.e.---a variable associated with teachers, books, or learning conditions) received nearly as high a percentage of affirmative response.

Perhaps what this data elucidates is that though many low level students must drop out due to conditions in their own lives, most will return at the first opportunity if they feel confident that the teacher available will present information to them, and explain procedures to them, in a clear and simple manner.

Even though originally they may have felt uneducated and of low intelligence, their experience with a particular teacher probably

resulted in learning. Thus, though they still might not have confidence in themselves, they might have confidence that this teacher has the skills that would allow them to learn. Their experience with this teacher has been so rewarding that it motivates persons to return to their program each chance they get.

THE TEACHER BEST HELPED ME LEARN BY:



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE A.B.E. PROGRAM TO LOW LEVEL STUDENTS WHO DROPPED OUT?

> "Nearly every person interviewed in this study named one or more ways in which the program had provided their life with significant benefit."

Ninety-two percent of all those interviewed stated that they had improved their reading or math skills as a result of attending an Adult Learning Center. However, when asked to name the benefits of participating in an A.B.E. program, only 45.5 percent mentioned that they felt better educated. Six percent felt it helped with their job. Less than one percent felt it helped them gain entry into an advanced educational program. Six percent felt it gave them more self-confidence. Three percent felt they could better help their children with their school work. Another three percent felt it helped them to better cope with the challenges of daily life. Less than two percent had achieved the goal of the majority upon entrance--to pass the G.E.D. examination.

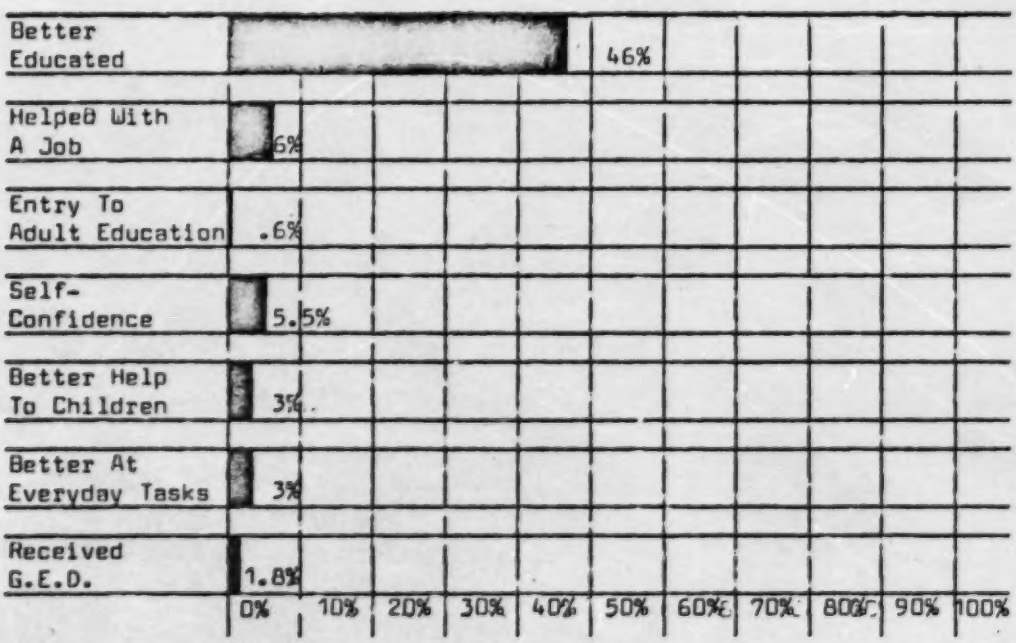
Thus, nearly every person interviewed in this study named one or more ways in which the program had provided their life with significant benefit.

The Fallon study showed that 44 percent of the students in the Gateway Technical Institute program got better jobs after their participation in the program. Thirty-three percent of these students enrolled in another educational program. Seventy-seven and six tenths percent improved their reading skills.

It should be noted that the Fallon study included both drop outs and non-drop outs. Perhaps the differences in the "jobs" and "advanced education" questions can be attributed to this factor. None-the-less, the number of persons who improved their skills in reading and/or math is high and positive for both studies.

It seems likely that the primary benefit a low level student can expect to gain from participation in an A.B.E. program is some improvement in his/her reading or math skills.

BENEFITS



IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study began with five specific questions about the low educational level Adult Basic Education drop outs of Northwest Indiana:

1. What brings them to the program?
2. What program aspects do they like?
3. What program aspects do they dislike?
4. Why do they drop out?
5. What benefits did they derive from their stay?

To answer these questions 184 former Adult Basic Education students were interviewed. These were persons selected because (1) they had dropped out during the 1979-80 school year, (2) they entered the A.B.E. program at a "4th grade or below" educational level, and (3) they were available to be interviewed.

A tested questionaire was administered to them by trained peers, either person to person interviews or by telephone.

The report of findings was compiled and distributed.

The most difficult task in the preceding process was the interviewing process. The interviewers were given 329 names of potential contacts and the interviewers successfully contacted 184 former students. The remaining 145 represents hundreds of attempts to locate former students. Many of these attempts had to be made in high crime areas of the city. No interview was abandoned until three separate attempts were made to locate and contact that person.

Several conclusions were drawn from the data gathered in this study. First, most low level students drop out of Adult Learning Centers because

of conditions which are outside the classroom and largely beyond the teacher's control.

This, "no-fault" conclusion is not to indicate that a teacher may legitimately despair and cease providing quality instruction. To the contrary, our data points to providing instruction that is "clear and simple" as being the most effective means of sustaining attendance in students whose lives allow them to attend sporadically, at best.

What the "no-fault" conclusion should do for the practioner is provide the basis for a practical expectation about drop out rates with low educational level students.

There is reason for feeling hopeful about the attendance of this difficult audience in the programs studied since they appear overwhelmingly satisfied with their past A.B.E. experiences and can find little to criticize about them.

Instead fixating on the turnover rate of this group, one should strive to establish the "optimum learning conditions" for adult learning in one's center. The measure of one's success should be such conditions and not the capricious variables which control the lives of many of our most under educated clientele.

The second conclusion which can be drawn from the data is that low educational level students become aware of A.B.E. programs because of indirect and direct effects of advertising. But when they decide to attend it is because of a desire to pass the G.E.D. Clearly, advertis-

ing of the A.B.E. programs is vital and must continue. But perhaps a better service could be done with our advertising if we switched the emphasis from G.E.D. preparation to some of the other legitimate reasons to improve ones education (for instance--to help one's children, self-improvement, etc.). After all, advertising not only informs and attracts clients, it also tends to shape their expectations. If low education level students came to the A.B.E. program with expectations that could be more readily gratified, perhaps they would not be so likely to become discouraged and drop out.

An excellent area for new research might be to determine whether students who have a wider gap between their educational goal and their educational level at entry have a higher likelihood of premature exit from the program.

Another area that deserves further research is the importance of method of study to student attendance. The data in this study indicate that the preferred method of study varies among urban students, suburban students, and rural students. But the importance of that factor is blurred by the fact that the availability of preferred methods of instruction appear to have little or no relationship to these students' rating of the teacher, expressions of discouragement or plans to attend the center in the future. This certainly appears to be an enigma and deserves more research.

The third conclusion is that low educational level students are likely to derive benefit from attendance at an Adult Learning Center

even if that attendance is prematurely terminated. The most likely benefit is improved skill in reading or math.

It is clear that the A.B.E. program is beneficial to nearly all who attend. Furthermore, since most persons recognize that they have benefited by attendance, it is not surprising that nearly all of the drop outs interviewed planned to attend again in the future. It is quite possible that the present tact in recruiting and retaining low educational level students in those centers studied is the optimum approach. It encourages the under educated to take a chance at getting their education. It serves them well as long as circumstances will allow them to stay. And it leaves them desiring more so that when their life circumstances change they are more likely to return to a center and pick up where they left off.

This "optimum approach" apparently is less the teaching method than the teacher's skill. Methods vary between centers with the use of lecture, small group discussion, tutorial approach, learning laboratory machines and programmed texts. Yet, the most significant factor associated with drop outs who return is not a particular method of instruction but the teacher behavior of giving clear and simple explanations.

For those who would attract and retain the low level academic student, perfecting the teaching skill of giving clear and simple explanations can be highly recommended. It may be satisfying a low academic level student's most profound educational need.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Darrell, and John Neimi. Adult Education and the Disadvantaged Adult. Syracuse, N.Y.: ERIC, 1969.

Beder, Harold, and Cynthia John. The ABE Target Potulation in Iowa: A Preliminary Report. Unpublished paper presented at the Adult Education Association National Conference in Tucson, Arizona, April 4-8, 1977.

Boshier, R. W. "Educational Participation and Dropout: A Theoretical Model." Adult Education, 1973.

_____. "Factor Analysts at Large: A Critical Review of the Motivational Orientation Literature." Adult Education, Fall 1976.

_____. "Motivational Orientations of Adult Education Participants: A Factor Analytic Exploration of Houles Typology." Adult Education, 1971.

_____. "Motivational Orientations Re-visited: Life Space Motives and the Education Participation Scale." Adult Education, 1976.

Burgess, Paul D. "Reasons for Adult Participation in Group Educational Activities." Adult Education, 1971.

Cervantes, Lucius F. The Dropout, Causes and Cures. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965.

Egan, Evelyn. "Recruiting the A.B.E. Student." Urban Area Adult Basic Education. San Diego, California: Western Campus, U.S. International University, 1969.

Exeter, G. W. Recruiting Disadvantaged Adults. Morehead, Ky.: Appalachian Adult Education Center, Morehead State University, 1975.

Fallon, Ruth. Adult Basic Education Follow-up Study (Paper presented at the Adult Education Research Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 20-22, 1977); E.R.I.C. Document Reproduction Service, P. O. Box 190, Arlington, VA, ED 139-997, p. 17.

Haag, D. "Psychological Foundation of Motives for Participation in Adult Education." Unpublished Ph.D. disseratation, University of British Columbia, 1976.

Hand, Samuel. A Review of Physiological and Psychological Changes in Aging and Their Implications for Teachers of Adults. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State Department of Education, Division of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education, April, 1968.

Hurkamp, Rosemary C. Differences in Some Initial Attitudes of Students Who Complete and Students Who Drop Out in the Wellesley, Massachusetts Adult Education Program. Final Report. Boston: School of Education, Boston University, January, 1968.

Kempfer, Homer. Identifying Educational Needs of Adults. Washington, D. C.: Office of Education, 1951.

Langdon, G. E. "The Socio-Psychological Sphere of the Under-Educated Adult," in Counseling Educationally Disadvantaged Adults. Edited by Rose Mary Pattison. Indianapolis: Division of Adult Education, Indiana Department of Public Instruction, 1968.

Miller, H. L. Participation of Adults in Education: A Force-Field Analysis. Massachusetts Center for the Study of Liberal Education for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1967.

Moss, Doris, and Robert Richardson. A Study of Students Who Discontinued Attendance in the E.S.E.A. III Adult Basic Education Program. Brooklyn: New York City Board of Education, June, 1967.

Mulvey, Mary C. Recruitment in Adult Basic Education, Handbook. April, 1969.

Murphy, Gardner, and Raymond Kuhlen. Psychological Needs of Adults. Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1955.

Murphy, Lois B., and Henry Ladd. Emotional Factors in Learning. New York: Columbia University Press, 1944.

Puder, W. H., and S. E. Hand. "Personality Factors which May Interfere with the Learning of A.B.E. Students." Adult Education, XVIII (Winter 1968), 81-93.

Rich, R., and E. Nuipok. "Recruitment and Relation for A.B.E. Classes." Urban Area Basic Education. San Diego, California: Western Campus, U. S. International University, 1969.

Richardson, Chad, and Loren M. Nyer, Participation in Texas Progress of Adult Basic Education; An Identification and Analysis of Factors Related to Rates of Enrollment, Attendance, and Completion in Adult Basic Education (Austin, Texas, 1974), p. 78.

Walden, B. L. Recruitment and Retention of the Adult Learners. Montgomery, Alabama: Alabama State Department of Education, 1975.

APPENDIX

Interviewed (1) In Person ____
(2) By Phone ____

QUESTIONAIRE

Level I in Reading ____ Math ____ Interview Team _____

1. Former student's name _____

2. Address _____

3. What adult learning center did you attend?

   (1) Gary ____ (2) Portage ____

   (3) Rensselaer ____ (4) Kouts ____

   (5) Cedar Lake ____ (6) Knox ____

   (7) Other ____

   Explain other _____

4. Are you currently studying at an adult learning center? (1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

5. Why did you stop attending the adult learning center?

   (1) Had other things I would rather spend my time on ____

   (2) Didn't like something at the center ____ Explain _____

   (3) Completed what I set out to do ____ (4) Moved ____.

   (5) Too busy with the family ____

6. Have you entered another training program since you stopped attending the adult learning center?

   (1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

   If yes, what program? _____

7. Did a member of your family or a friend encourage you to attend the adult learning center?

   (1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

   If yes, was it (1) parents ____ (2) brother/sister ____ (3) close relative ____

   (4) distant relative ____ (5) close friend ____ (6) casual friend ____

8. Was any member of your family or a friend opposed to your attending the adult learning center?

(1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

If yes, was it (1) parents ____ (2) brother/sister ____ (3) close relative ____

(4) distant relative ____ (5) close friend ____ (6) casual friend ____

(7) other ____ Explain _____

9. How did you hear about the adult learning center?

(1) sign at the center ____ (2) flyer ____ (3) an alumnus ____

(4) someone who had heard about it ____ (5) radio ____ (6) TV ____

(7) newspaper ____ (8) highway sign ____ (9) 4-H fair booth ____ (10) other __

Explain _____

10. What kind of reasons did you have for attending the adult learning center?

(1) to prepare for the G.E.D. ____

(2) to learn so I could get a better job ____

(3) to learn another educational program ____

(4) to learn to read better ____

(5) to improve math skills ____

(6) to feel better about myself ____

(7) to help my kids with school work ____

11. How would you rate the teacher? _____

12. Answer the following statements with a true or false response.

(1) The adult learning center you attended was a friendly place.

True ___ False ___

(2) Your teacher had enough time to help you when you needed help.

True ___ False ___

(3) Your teacher understood your learning problems.

True ___ False ___

(4) Your teacher helped you learn.

True ___ False ___

(5) Your teacher made it hard for you to learn.

True ___ False ___

(6) Your adult learning center teacher made you feel dumb.

True ___ False ___

(7) The learning center teacher treated you like an adult.

True ___ False ___

13. Did your teacher do anything that particularily helped you to learn?

(1) was friendly ____ (2) spoke reassuringly, never harshly ____

(3) explained things well ____ (4) always had time to help me ____

(5) gave me helpful books ____ (6) called me when I was absent from class ____

(7) gave me hope that I could learn ____ (8) other ____ Explain _____

_____

14. What did your teacher do that made it hard to learn?

(1) was unfriendly ____ (2) spoke to me like a child ____ (3) did not explain things so I could understand ____ (4) rarely had time to help me ____

(5) gave me books that were too hard ____ (6) made me feel dumb ____

(7) was prejudiced ____ (8) other ____ Explain other _____

15. Which of the following is the way you liked studying at the adult learning center best? Please check only one.

(1) studying alone ____

(2) studying one to one with the teacher ____

(3) studying and discussing with a small group of students ____

(4) listening to a lecture ____

(5) group activities ____

(6) other ____ Explain other _____

16. Was this type of studying available in your center? _____

17. How often? (1) Everytime ____ (2) Many times ____ (3) Few times ____

(4) Not at all ____

18. Did you like the other students at the adult learning center?

(1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

19. Did you like the books and materials used at the adult learning center?

(1) Yes ____ (2) No ____

If yes, what did you like about them? (1) easy to read ____ (2) had clear explanations ____ (3) exercises helped me to learn ____ (4) I could go at my own pace ____ (5) other ____ Explain other _____

If no, what didn't you like about them? (1) too hard to read _____

(2) explanations too difficult to understand ____ (3) exercises were confusing ____ (4) I couldn't tell what to study first ____ (5) other ____

Explain other _____

20. What services would you like to see adult learning centers provide?

Which of the following services would you consider important for the A.L.C. to provide?

(2) transportation to classes

(3) counseling ___ (4) different hours ___

(5) more social activities ___ (6) job referral ___

(7) other ___ Explain other _____

21. Did you improve your reading skills or math skills at the adult learning center?

(1) yes ___ (2) no ___

22. How did this benefit you?

(1) Did the adult learning center help you get a better job?

Yes ___ No ___

(2) Did the adult learning center help you make new friends?

Yes ___ No ___

(3) Do you manage your money better since attending the adult learning center?

Yes ___ No ___

(4) Are you more interested in the news since attending the adult learning center?

Yes ___ No ___

(5) Do you read more since attending the adult learning center?

Yes ___ No ___

(6) Did your attending the adult learning center enable you to get a library card?

Yes ___ No ___

(7) Did you register to vote as a result of attending the adult learning center?

Yes ___ No ___

(8) Did your attending the adult learning center enable you to get a drivers license? Yes ___ No ___

(9) Did the adult learning center help you give up public assistance?

 Yes ___ No ___

23. Are you planning to attend an adult learning center again in the future?

Yes ____ No ____

24. What was the most discouraging thing about the whole experience?

25. What was the best thing in the whole learning experience?

26. If you could change one thing about the program you were in, what would you change?

27. Was there one thing, more than anything else; that, if it had been changed, would have made you stay?